Day in the life

By L. Glenzer III

I awoke at 6:45am, it was very cold, my house lost heat for 2 days and was around 40 degrees, two blankets and a space heater and I survived. I got my work clothes together, brushed my teeth, showered, and left for school. I drove down fullerton ave. for about 25 minutes and got to school at 7:40am. I listened to national public radio on the way to get some news updates. When I got to school I checked my mailbox and went upstairs to the band room and put my jacket and bag away. I got coffee in the cafeteria and went down to the art room for Tuesday meetings. Classes are shortened on Tuesday’s so the staff can have an hour meeting and the students can have an hour homeroom. I like Tuesday’s because I canm have a breather in the morning, drink some coffee and collect my thoughts before the first period class.

In the meeting for the fine arts department the agenda was to discuss how to bring students grades up that were failing in order to improve metrics to get our school off probation. Our school has been on probation for 4 years but has been making positive trends and is now very close to bringing the metrics high enough to get out of probationary status. Percentage of failing students is one of the metrics our school can improve on, but there is controversy over putting pressure on teachers to push students and change students grades. The fine arts chair asked everyone to give suggestions, and I gave a few including rewards, diligent student conferencing, and printing our a failure report on gradebook that has every student that a teacher has and the classes they are failing. This report helps with zeroing in on the students that only have one class failing, instead of all there classes which would require a enormous effort to turn around in the week and a half left before final exam and semester grades are due. There was also some discussion on being lenient with students and changing there grades just so our school would get off probation. I could see there viewpoint on this but did not agree, but I did not say anything. I often keep my opinions to myself because I do not approve of the other music teachers teaching practices, most are doing the job for a pay check and have outright admitted it with no shame. I feel I am living and working with the core problems of education in the united states right at my school in the city. I wanted to say maybe trying new strategies in your teaching rather then following the same plan that some teachers have followed for the last 20 years, no wonder there failure rate is so high. I understand each teacher has there own specific way of teaching, both good and bad, but overall it just causes me great frustration. Optimistically I feel I am in a unique situation where I can observe try and solve some of the immense problems education as a whole is having currently. The department chair bought bagels and juice for everyone, I was extremely appreciative, I normally do not eat anything till lunch and it putme in a better mood.

When the meeting was over I went back up to the band room, wrote my agenda on the board and students slowly funneled in. I waited by the door and talked one on one with students that were late. Beginning band students began warming up there instruments and we went through a rigorous review playing almost constantly for 20 minutes. I briefly covered what would be on the final exam and the period was over. I end each period performing something the students like and are successful at, and then shout GO BAND! To conclude so the students leave with some adrenaline and a good vibe. Second period beginning band came in and the period went well with the same lesson being taught for the three beginning band periods I teach. Anything that does not go right in first period I adapt for 2nd period, and then adapt again for 5th period. If I change anything significant I add it to the next day to keep the periods consistant. This constant adaptation is molding my teaching skills and is great for honing my skills.

After 2nd period we had an hour homeroom that I have cooperatively with another teacher. Today that teacher watched the class and I was able to go downstairs and do some copying of new music that I received on Monday for intermediate band. I came back upstairs after getting my copies and talked with a few students and made an announcement to students about makeup work and the impending final exams and semester grades and the importance of passing. The bell rang and 3rd period intermediate band came in.

I took too long with the warm up for intermediate band and only a small amount of material was covered only getting half way through the agenda. Class periods on Tuesdays can be challenging when considering the pace of the class which is crucial in rehearsing ensembles and something I am constantly trying to improve at. I adjusted this for 7th period intermediate band and we covered a lot more of the agenda for that day.

After 3rd period I have my first planning period of the day. I grabbed my coffee and notebook and and went down to the basement where I work. I don’t hang around the spots in the school where teachers talk and gossip, I tend to stay away from that. I try and find a place to work and get stuff done as fast as possible so I go down to the basement where everyone is in work mode. I did my attendance on the computer, checked my school email, and did some more copying before the period ended and I went back upstairs to the band room for 5th period beginning band.

5th period beginning band went smoothly and I went out to lunch during 6th period, my next free period. I drove to subway, ate in my car and listened to national public radio, they were discussing the political situation and uprisings in Tunisia, I found this fascinating. I drove back to school and went back up to the band room to teach 7th period. 7th period intermediate band went smoothly due to adapting to mistakes I made in 3rd period intermediate band. 8th period I had off and went back to the basement, finished my attendance for the day on the computer, check my school email again, and did some more copying. When the final bell rang I headed back upstairs to the band orom to check if any students wanted an after school lesson.

One student showed up for an after school lesson, an intermediate band student that plays baritone horn. I gave him a lesson for 45 mins – he was mainly there to improve his grade as he was failing the class due to an immense amount of absences 1st quarter and not attending the concert. The lesson was very successful, I played baritone with him modeling the necessary skills, and he did very well. I feel I am still most effective at one on one teaching rather then large ensemble group rehearsing where it usually 50-1 ratio. After the lesson I went into the other music teachers room to see what they were up to after school. A few students were practicing piano and two teachers were sitting down talking. I briefly talked to them and then went back to the band room where I collected my stuff and went back down to the basement where I finished copying two more arrangements to sight read tomoroow. After finishing copying I clocked out and drove home.

I chilled, literally chilled at my house, it was about 40 degrees and the heat was still not fixed, packed my stuff and traveled to another high school for a community band rehearsal I perform in every Tuesday night. I have rehearsals every single night of the week except Wednesdays where I attend my graduate class. This can be tiring at times but is necessary to keep my musician skills in shape. The rehearsal went well, my chops were working fine, and a few students who performed in the band I helped out with music so I got to perform and teach a bit at the same time which is great.

After rehearsal I went to jewel osco and bought some chicken to eat for dinner and went home. I sat down to eat when the electrician knocked on my door and told me he fixed the heat, although the house was still about 5 degrees is was comforting to know eventually I would not freeze to death. I ate dinner and watched some TV for about an hour and then started writing this paper which has taken approximately one hour and 5 minutes to write. After I finish writing this paper I’m going to collect my paperwork for tomorrow, lessons plans, etc. pack them in my bag, listen to some tunes and fall asleep.

This day was chosen for a combination of procrastination and looming deadline combined with a day where I was teaching and performing, two things I feel I am extremely passionate about and am blessed for having the opportunity to do and still support myself in making a living.

“Time is a companion who goes with us on the journey and reminds us to cherish every moment because they'll never come again. What we leave behind is not as important as how we've lived.”